

CHAPTER – IV

QUEST FOR IDENTITY AND INDIAN

SENSIBILITY

4.1 Quest for Identity:

The emergence of the literary works of the prominent writer Jhumpa Lahiri has a significant contribution in the realm of fiction. The Indian literary scenes are introduced in her novel and short stories. Her novels and short stories rejoice the images of her visit to India. Her vivid description of Calcutta made a conscience effort to reconnect to her roots. The novels depict the Indian social structure. It also reflects the dynamic changes among the migrated families. Jhumpa also involved the contemporary issues of India such as about the Naxalites. Her novels depict the quest for identity. It is the result of assimilation of different cultures. “The Namesake” and “Lowland” attempt to show the impediments of migration and highlighted the unification of different cultures. According to Donald Oken, *‘the loss of identity results in alienation’*. The concern for identity crisis has been portrayed in “The Namesake” and “The Lowland” through the characters especially the second generation immigrants. She aesthetically designed the theme of her novels ‘the search for identity’.

The changes of expected roles in the society causes the perplexity of an individual’s sense of identity. The conflict of role disorientation and self-perception among the characters like Gauri (The Lowland) and Gogol (The Namesake) are important aspects. These characters cope up with the changes and assimilate with different ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. Folklore plays an important role in the structure of identity. It can provide a distinct trait of a particular ethnic or geographical group which distinguishes them from others. The conflict of maintaining cultural identity is evident in the multicultural society. Jhumpa represents her ethnic cultural identity in an international platform. The cultural identity of Calcutta is manifested and different forms of traditions are signified in her novels.

Identity represents the uniqueness or distinctiveness of an individual or a particular group. Some elements that can help to determine identity of an individual or a community are-

location, gender, race, history, nationality, sexuality, religious beliefs, ethnicity, language, aesthetics, customs and food.

Identity development varies among the immigrant groups during their shift to a new society. An individual exposed to only one culture doesn't face any perplexity. But immigrants quest for their personal and cultural identity. The first generation immigrants try to retain their cultural heritage while searching for their identity. The second generation immigrants reflect the confused identity orientation because of the insecurity of where they belong. They are neither completely detached from their heritage nor fully acknowledged in the new society. The third generation tend to assimilate and adapt the new environment.

Identity crisis can lead to difficulty in making essential decisions of life. The diffused status may not give the clear insight. The personal and cultural identity plays an important role in navigating the difficulties of life.

Jhumpa Lahiri as a novelist uses her heritage to draw artistic references. Her roots are deeply imbedded within her which she uses as a novelist. The use of Indian setting in all her novels is evident of her roots. The significance of national values and cultural identity in literature is clearly depicted in both her novels.

Jhumpa Lahiri uses following approaches to affirm her identity:-

1. Highlights ideal environment of India.
2. Demonstrates cultural matrix of Calcutta.
3. Glorifying ideal personalities.

The elements of Lahiri's novels which determine identity are as follows:-

4.2 The Lowland

Lahiri introduces her first novel “The Lowland” with the theme of immigrant families who struggle for their identity. The story is about two brothers who grew up in a small village Tollygunge of Calcutta. The characters are illustrated as opposite personalities. Their lives take a different turn in the later part of the novel. As they were detached by country and time space. Subhash leaves India to pursue a doctorate in Marine Biology in Rhode Island and Udayan gets involved in the Naxalite movement. Here, Jhumpa pictures the horror of Naxalite movement in Calcutta. This political movement follows the tenants of Mao’s communism. The novel highlights the strained relationships among the characters.

Lahiri presents the different insights of each characters. She focuses cultural and political context in which the characters lived. The characters thrive for their identity. They try to cope up with dislocation and assimilation. The balance of East and West is carefully weaved.

Both the brothers are born just fifteen months apart and are often mistaken for the other. Despite of their closeness, they have opposite temperament. Subhash is quiet and obedient whereas Udayan is charismatic and impulsive. The novels depict their divergent fates.

The novel focuses on the relationship status of the characters. In the second part of the novel, Udayan found his love Gauri, a philosophy student of The Presidency College. Later they elopes with her brother’s consent. Udayan’s parents were unhappy but they accepted Gauri as their daughter-in-law. On the other hand Subhash falls in love with Holly. But Holly ends up the relationship.

The third part of the novel brings up Udayan’s death in the political movement. His death takes place in the lowland where both the brothers grew up. He was shot by the policemen in front of his parents and Gauri. Subhash flew back to Calcutta as he heard about his brother’s death. He found that Gauri was living with his parents. She lived a widow’s life restrained from all the earthly happiness as per the social norms. He intended to take her to Rhode

Island and provide her a new life. His parents hated her more. But Gauri agreed to his proposal.

Eventually Gauri gave birth to Bela and started a new life in a new land where she hardly knew anyone. The haunting thoughts of Udayan's death drifts away. She began to pursue further studies while Subhash took care of Bela. He turned out to be a good parent compared to her. As she was self-sustained, she devoted her time in studies and research work. Their relationship suffered as Gauri couldn't put much effort into it.

The next part of the novel takes a turn as Gauri left Subhash and Bela. She went to California where she succeeded as a notable person in her field. On the other hand Bela struggled as she grew up without her mother. Subhash began a new relationship in his sixties with one of Bela's high school teacher Elise. Meanwhile Bela discovered about her biological father and the reason behind strained relationship of her parents.

In the final chapters of the novel, Subhash tried to contact Gauri for ending their relationship officially. Gauri out of guilt decided to finally face Subhash for leaving him and her daughter. She returned to their house at Rhode Island. Bela with her daughter confronted her. She accused Gauri for being selfish and denied her existence to Meghna. The novel ends with Bela's letter to her mother. The letter suggested that perhaps they should try to meet again. Jhumpa also depicts Udayan's final day where he regretted for his acts. His final thought was that his life would have been different if had met Gauri sooner.

The novel weaves the different phases of relations. From the strained relationship of Subhash and Gauri to the strong bond of Bela and Subhash. The novel depicts the quest of identity among the characters.

4.2.1 Diasporic Identity-

Diaspora is the situation when a group of people shift from their native place and settle into a different place. They experience identity crisis. The cultural, ideological and intellectual discourses are included in diaspora identity. This study emphasizes on the issue of diasporic identity in the novel. The portrayal of diaspora situation in the novel is represented by Subhash and Gauri. The lowland stresses on the story of Indian immigrants in the United States. Their notion of cultural identity revealed the diasporic identity.

Subhash and Gauri in a diaspora situation try to deal with their identities differently. Subhash adjusts with his new culture gradually still holding onto his native culture. He struggles through some contrastive insights. There are some instances of his puzzled thoughts.

The expatriation induced these kind of puzzling thoughts, “It was a portrait of a city Subhash no longer felt a part of. A city on the brink of something; a city he was preparing to leave behind.”

“But he was no longer in Tollygunge. He had stepped out of it as he had stepped so many mornings out of dreams, its reality and its particular logic rendered meaningless in the light of day.” This is the instance where he feels alienated in this foreign land far from his origin.

Subhash reminisces about his bygone days in Calcutta. He felt the distance which is evident in this line, “Here, in this place surrounded by sea, he was drifting far from his point of origin”. He felt uncertain and improvisational in this distant land.

The manifestation of diasporic identity can be found when Subhash refused to join Richard for protesting a war in America. He quoted, “It’s not my place to object”.

The identity of Subhash in a diaspora situation is perplexed and uncertain as he relocated in a far off land.

Jhumpa Lahiri highlights the diasporic dilemma of the characters. They try to deal with the relationships and social conventions. Her characters struggle with the emotional link and adjustment. 'The lowland' represents the themes of identities, dislocation and choices of the characters. The characters suffer as they try to adjust with each other. It focusses on the characters' inner landscapes. The intricate study of intergenerational and marital tensions.

The character 'Gauri' plays an intricate role in the novel. She deals with the emotional dilemma of losing her husband in the Naxalite Movement. Jhumpa focuses on Gauri's troubled past and her identity crisis in a foreign land. Initially she tries to cope up with her new husband and her daughter. But gradually she alienates herself from them and struggle to build her own identity. She thrives to break the conventions and pursue her dreams. She struggles throughout the novel. The role of Gauri clearly portrays the identity crisis and integration with the hybrid culture. She alters her dresses from traditional to western and also cuts her hair. She defied to play the traditional role of a woman as a mother and wife. Gauri made her own choices and without any proper justification sets out to determine her own identity. She left behind her responsibilities. The novel portrays the dilemma of duty and ideology.

The protagonist 'Subhash' plays an important role in the novel. Subhash has a prominent role in his family. His childhood is beautifully portrayed in the village of Tollygunge along with his brother Udayan. They grew up in the lowland which is the title of the novel. The death of his brother in a political movement shifts his emotional link with his family. He married his brother's widow to rescue her. Subhash is an ideal husband and father. His identity in a distant land is complex. He finds his roots in India. It is evident in his struggle to maintain a cordial relationship with his family. He also takes his daughter to India and reconnects to his roots.

The character Bela portrays the perplexing disputes in the novel. Her quest for identity is depicted throughout the novel. Her troubled childhood plays a great role in her character. She deals with the estranged relationship of her parents. She travels without any particular destination. Her perplexing identity as a second generation immigrant is conspicuous in the novel. Bela is unaware of her true identity. She refuses to claim Udayan as her father. She shares a cordial bond with Subhash. Initially she doesn't involve in any kind of romantic relationship but later she regains her faith in it. She gives birth to Meghna. In the last part of the novel, the character Bela forgives her mother and opens up for building a new relationship. Her pursuit of happiness lies within her family.

4.2.2 Perplexity of Identity:

The author shows the foundation of Indian identity in America. The way the immigrants view and incorporate themselves into mainstream. Ethnicity, traditions and cultures penetrate into the hybrid identity. The perplexity between traditional values and recently acquired practices causes an identity crisis.

- Bela's first visit to India after her grandfather's death exposed her to the Indian traditions. As a second generation immigrant she felt unfamiliar to it. Her grandmother gave her boiled water to drink. Her grandmother saw Bela trying to pick up rice and lentils with her fingers. She knew Bela's not made to survive there so she gave her spoons.

As Bela was born and brought up in America, her grandmother worried that the weather and water of India might deteriorate her health. Moreover she wasn't accustomed to certain Indian way of life. The two different outlook are interpreted.

Subhash sets example as the first generation and Bela as the second generation immigrants.

- Bela was always anxious for her father in India. She was concerned that he would be swallowed up by the rowdy city. She didn't want him to be its prey. Bela worried that her father might not return home. She thought she would lose him in India. The social dislocation is evident in these lines. Bela felt more close to America.
- Due to assimilation, the second generation of immigrants mostly use the dominant language. Bela was more fluent in English so she quoted, 'It was too much to explain in Bengali'.
- Gauri's adopted of new culture. She abandoned sari and wore slacks and tunic.
- Subhash thought of Durga Pujo and wanted to go home in his third autumn in Rhode Island. He reminisced about Tollygunge, Mahalaya playing on All India Radio. The whole of West Bengal woke up in darkness to listen to the oratorio invoking Durga to descend on earth with her four children. Initially the absence of the holiday in America hadn't mattered to him but now he preferred to go back home. He had always received parcels from his parents from the past two years. The parcels contained gifts of Pujo such as Kurtas, bars of sandalwood soap, some Darjeeling tea. Subhash was pining for his homeland. He felt miserable for his inconvenience to go back home during the Pujo. There were no Pujo holidays in America unlike India.

4.2.3 Cultural Dislocation

The Lowland revolves around India and the United States. The scenes of Calcutta is finely described but most of the events are illustrated in Rhode Island. Due to cultural dislocation the immigrants can feel perplexity, anxiety, and insecurity. Subhash and Gauri experience the

culture shock in United States. The cultural dislocation of this immigrant couple and their integration with the new culture is depicted in the novel. The hybrid culture is adopted due to the dissimilarity of both the cultures. 'The Lowland' signifies the diversity and cultural dislocation.

The contrasting images drawn by Lahiri are-

- "For some reasons the church reminded him of the small mosque that stood at the corner of his family's neighbourhood in Tollygunge." (The Lowland: P 47)

The church situated at the top of the hill reminded him about the mosque which had served as a landmark in his life.

- "On cloudy days, at intervals, the sound of a foghorn pierced the air, as conch shells were blown in Calcutta to ward off evil." (The Lowland: P 46)

The sound of the foghorn is compared with the conch shells. Both are different images from Calcutta and Rhode Island. Conch shells are considered very sacred in India.

- "That day the roads were empty, the whole town at rest. Whatever happened on the occasion, however it was celebrated, there was no sign of it. No procession that he knew of, no public festivity." (The Lowland: P 54)

Subhash was bewildered as he was the only customer at an Italian restaurant during Thanksgiving. In India, festival drives people from all over the corners. Roads would be filled with people.

- "Here, in this place surrounded by sea, he was drifting far from his point of origin." (The Lowland: P 49)

Subhash always wanted to leave Calcutta and start a new life but despite of his hectic routine, he felt uncertain. He felt as if some part of him was missing in Rhode Island.

- Subhash recalled about India in his third autumn in Rhode Island. “Once more the leaves of the trees lost their chlorophyll, replaced by the shades he had left behind: vivid hues of cayenne and turmeric and ginger pounded fresh every morning in the kitchen, to season the food his mother prepared.

Once more these colours seemed to have been transported across the world, appearing in the treetops that lined his path.” (The Lowland: P 99)

Subhash reminisced the hues of his native land. The taste of the food his mother cooked. He soothed his soul with these memories in Rhode Island.

- Holly made dinner for Subhash. “They ate pieces of chicken cooked in mushrooms and wine, served with bread warmed in the oven instead of rice. The taste was complex, flavourful but without heat of any kind. He pulled out the bay leaf she had put in. These grow on a tree behind my family’s home, he said. Only they are twice the size.” (The Lowland: P 86)

It is evident that the difference of food habits in both the places (Calcutta and Rhode Island). So, Subhash found a complex taste in the food cooked by Holly.

- When Subhash returned to Tollygunge after two years, he welcomed the sun on his skin and felt the absence of bitter cold. He had forgotten the possibility of so many human beings in one space. He was disappointed because his parents didn’t acknowledge his return. But his mother had promised him a hero’s welcome, a garland of flowers draped around his neck when he stepped off the train.

This is a contrasting image of the diverse cultural activity of both the countries. Generally, festivals in India demand huge public gatherings but the celebration of Thanksgiving in Rhode Island was quite different for Subhash.

4.2.4 Background of the Novel:

‘The Lowland’ is set on the background of Naxalbari movement. It was an uprising armed peasant revolt in West Bengal. The term ‘Naxalbari’ originates from the name of the village Naxalbari in West Bengal. The movement had started in this village. It was led by local tribes and the radical communist leaders of Bengal. The Communist Party of India was led by Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal. The papers and All India Radio started publishing news about Naxalbari in 1967. It was one of a string of villages in the Darjeeling District, a narrow corridor at the northern tip of West Bengal. Tucked into the foothills of the Himalayas, nearly four hundred miles from Calcutta, closer to Tibet than to Tollygunge.

Most of the villagers were tribal peasants who worked on tea plantations and large estates. For generations they had lived under a feudal system that hadn’t substantially changed. They were manipulated by wealthy landowners. They were pushed off fields they had cultivated, denied revenue from crops they had grown. Deprived of subsistence wages, some died from lack of food. They started revolting. Armed with primitive weapons, carrying red flags, shouting *Long Live Mao Tse-tung*. Two Bengali communists, Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal, were helping to organize the movement.

4.3 THE NAMESAKE

The novel explores the identity conflicts of the Indian migrants. They deal with the problem of travelling across cultures. The process of adaptation to a different environment is evident in it. The overlapping intricacy of two cultures. The intensities of different intergenerational experiences. The cultural and structural assimilation affects the ethnic identity. Lahiri engages with the difficult issues of establishing a sense of self in a foreign land and deciding

which parts of one's cultural heritage can be successfully integrated into one's life as an American.

The novel begins Indian immigrants' intricate ways towards universal human identity. The motif of the novel is the journey of one's way to identity. The second generation immigrants are seen to adopt many of the behavioural patterns, values, and ideals of the mainstream group. They discard their parents' cultural heritage. They try to strengthen the integrating ties with the host country. The first generation constantly attempt to preserve the elements of their ethnic cultural background. The second generation finds it difficult to build their identity because they cannot easily identify fully with their ethnic roots. They are alienated with their progenitor's cultural adherence.

The theme of the novel is the motif of naming. The literal meanings of the names holds identity that transcends cultural identification. The Indian- American characters of the novel tries to shape their identity in the metaphorical journey of life. The Bengali tradition of having two first names is confounded in America. Good names are used for official purposes and pet names are used exclusively within the family. The protagonist of the novel is Gogol which is his pet name. His good name is Nikhil which means "he who is entire, encompassing all". These names are the motifs of one's cultural background because it reflects the culture of a certain community. The names are metaphor of their identity development in the course of the novel.

The Namesake explains the clash of two different cultures and its influence. Their identities are moulded according to their experience of different cultures. This paper mainly focuses on the development of the characters' bond to two places (America and India). The cultural identity holds the importance of values. It represents the features of self and a group to which one belongs. The cultures in conflict stand for universal human relationships which is

reflected in *The Namesake*. *The Namesake* discusses the journey of the characters of the novel towards their identity.

Ashima and Ashoke represent the first generation immigrants. It was Ashoke's decision to move to America and Ashima as his wife followed him. Ashoke moved to America to forget the gruesome train accident which changed his life. The accident gave him a new approach to life. It is difficult for them to live in a country with a culture so different from their home country. They attempt to retain their prevalent culture and integrate along with the new cultural traits. They speak Bengali at home and among the fellow Bengalis. They also celebrate Christmas and Thanksgiving along with other Indian festivals. Ashima's journey from America to India has certainly transformed and shaped her identity. She has acknowledged that both America and India stood as parts of her life. Their attachment to America changed after the birth of their first child. As Gogol was born as American citizen, it strengthens their ties with it.

The journey of second generation immigrants are different. Gogol is the main protagonist of the novel. He spends most of his time away from home. He tries to escape rather than to travel away from his roots. He discards the Bengali tradition of having two names. His rejection of the name Gogol seems to equal rejection of his family. On the other hand his sister Sonia has adapted to the new culture.

4.3.1 Perplexity of Identity:

Identity comprises of the social constructions such as race, ethnicity and nationality. Indians living in America have a divergence of authentic identification. It is a combination of the

cultural characteristics from both ethnicities. The immigrants of the novel 'The Lowland' experience the perplexing identity.

- “Ashima wonders if she is the only Indian person in the hospital, but a gentle twitch from the baby reminds her that she is, technically speaking, not alone. There is nothing to comfort her in the hospital in America. She thinks about India where women go home to their parents to give birth. While she was instructed to time the duration of the contractions, she consulted her watch. It was a bon voyage gift of her parents which brought back her memories of Calcutta. She calculated the Indian time on her hands. For an instant the weight of the baby vanished, replaced by the scene of her parents’ flat on Amherst Street of Calcutta.” (The Namesake: P 3,4)

Ashima was miserable in the hospital bed of America. She thought of the belief in Calcutta where child births took place in their parents’ home. She felt lonely in the hospital as the only Indian.

- “One day Gogol attends a panel discussion about Indian novels written in English. He feels obligated to attend; one of the presenters on the panel, Amit, is a distant cousin who lives in Bombay, whom Gogol has never met. His mother has asked him to greet Amit on her behalf. Gogol is bored by the panellists, who keep referring to something called “marginality,” as if it were some sort of medical condition. For most of the hour, he sketches portraits of the panellists, who sit hunched over their papers along a rectangular table. “Teleologically speaking, ABCDs are unable to answer the question ‘Where are you from?’ ” the sociologist on the panel declares. Gogol has never heard the term ABCD. He eventually gathers that it stands for “American-born confused *deshi*.” In other words, him. He learns that the C could also stand for “conflicted.” He knows that *deshi*, a generic word for “countryman,” means “Indian,” knows that his

parents and all their friends always refer to India simply as *desh*. But Gogol never thinks of India as *desh*. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India.

There are lots of ABCD on the campus. He has no ABCD friends at college. He avoids them, for they remind him too much of the way his parents choose to live, befriending people not so much because they like them, but because of a past they happen to share. For him, it is great hypocrisy of joining an organization that willingly celebrates occasions his parents forced him to attend throughout his childhood and adolescence.” (The Namesake: P 118)

Gogol doesn't feel close to India like his parents. His identity was baffled. He didn't like to join the Indian associations in his college. He chose to live American way of life.

- “Living with a pet name and a good name, in a place where such distinctions do not exist- surely that was emblematic of the greatest confusion of all.” (The Namesake: P 118)

Gogol had to face the bewilderment of dealing with two names. He tried to rename himself at a certain age. In Calcutta, it was common to have two names but he was in a different place now.

- Sonali and Gogol's visit to India made them realize about their parents' emotion towards their country. “Sonia whispered to her brother in English that she is scared, seeking his hand and refusing to let go.” (The Namesake: P 82)

Sonali and Gogol somewhat panicked as soon as they reached in India. Because they have been detached from their roots.

- “Ashima, now Monu, weeps with relief, and Ashoke, now Mithu, kisses his brothers on both cheeks, holds their heads in his hands. Gogol and Sonia know these people, but they do not feel close to them as their parents do.” (The Namesake: P 81)

Ashima and Ashoke have two names as the traditions of Calcutta. They become vulnerable as soon as they saw their cousins after a long time. On the other hand, Gogol and Sonia doesn't feel close to them.

- “Ashoke and Ashima slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wider, revealing a confidence in India which Gogol and Sonia never see on Pemberton Road.” (The Namesake: P 81)

Ashoke and Ashima are more confident in their own country. But the second generation immigrants are more confident in the new environment.

- “They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woollen scarves around snowmen, to colour boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house. For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate.” (The Namesake: P 64)

“During pujos, scheduled for convenience on two Saturdays a year, Gogol and Sonia are dragged off to a hall overtaken by Bengalis, where they are required to throw marigold petals at a cardboard effigy of a goddess.” (The Namesake: P 64)

Here, Ashima and Ashoke are perplexed about their children who look forward to Christmas far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati. They celebrate it for the sake of their children. They can't compare Durga pujo to Christmas.

- “Though she’d been polite enough the one time Gogol had brought Maxine to the house, Ashima doesn’t want her for a daughter-in-law. She’d been startled that Maxine had addressed her as Ashima, and her husband as Ashoke.” (The Namesake: P 166)

Ashima was astounded by Maxine’s actions. Because it is not the culture of India. In India, elders are always addressed with kinship terms and honorific pronoun.

1. “Ashima’s eyes fill with tears as Gogol’s mouth eagerly invites the spoon. She can’t help wishing her own brother were there to feed him, her own parents to bless him with their hands on his head.” (The Namesake: P 40)

“They ask Dilip Nandi to play the part of Ashima’s brother, to hold the child and feed him rice, the Bengali staff of life, for the very first time.” (The Namesake: P 38)

Ashima and Ashoke asked Dilip to play Gogol’s honorary uncle in the rice ceremony. As most of the rituals are performed by the maternal uncle, Dilip had to play the part of Ashima’s brother.

2. “Ashima thinks about Americans’ public declarations of affection. Despite of their miniskirts, bikinis, their hand-holding on the street and lying on top of each other, prefer their privacy. Ashima has neither heard words like ‘I love you’, nor expects to hear from her own husband; this is not how they are.” (The Namesake: P 3)

The author also distinguished the expression of affection by Americans and Indians. The public declaration of affection is not common in India.

3. “When Ashima calls out to Ashoke, she doesn’t say his name. Ashima never thinks of her husband’s name when she thinks of her husband, even though she knows perfectly well what it is. She has adopted his surname but refuses, for propriety’s sake, to utter

his first. It's not the type of thing Bengali wives do. Like a kiss or caress in a Hindi movie, a husband's name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over. And so, instead of saying Ashoke's name, she utters the interrogative that has come to replace it, which translates roughly as 'Are you listening to me?' ”
(The Namesake: P 2)

It is prohibited as a Bengali wife to take the name of their husband. It is their belief that it shouldn't be uttered.

4. “For hours the Indian families argue about the politics of America, a country in which none of them is eligible to vote.” (The Namesake: P 38)

The immigrants often discuss about the politics of America though they can't vote. They were detached from their origin and trying to fit in the new environment.

5. “Young Bengali bachelors often approach on the streets of Cambridge inquire about her origins.” (The Namesake: P 38)

The immigrants often try to build relation among each other as they share a common geographical history.

6. Most of Ashoke's friends in America are from Calcutta. “They are all from Calcutta, and for this reason alone they are friends.” (The Namesake: P 38)

Ashoke and Ashima try to befriend the Bengali immigrants. They try to relive their traditions and cultures in America. Their closeness remind them of their families. They are their extended family.

7. “All the wives are homesick and bewildered turn to Ashima for recipes and advice.

Ashima tells them that the carp sold in Chinatown and that it’s possible to make halwa from cream and wheat.” (The Namesake: P 38)

Ashima and the other wives try to collect recipes and ingredients to make Indian dishes.

- “Gogol’s fourteenth birthday was another excuse for his parents to throw a party for their Bengali friends. His own friends from school were invited the previous day, a tame affair, with pizzas that his father picked up on his way home from work, a basketball game watched together on television, some Ping-Pong in the den. The box of harlequin ice cream, the hot dogs in the buns, the balloons and streamers taped to the walls. The other celebration, the Bengali one, is held on the closest Saturday to the actual date of his birth. As usual his mother cooks for days beforehand, cramming the refrigerator with stacks of foil-covered trays. She makes sure to prepare his favourite things: lamb curry with lots of potatoes, luchis, thick channa dal with swollen brown raisins, pineapple chutney, sandeshes moulded out of saffron-tinted ricotta cheese. Close to forty guests come from three different states. Women dressed in saris far more dazzling than the outfits of their husbands.

All this is less stressful to Ashima than the task of feeding a handful of American children, half of whom always claim they are allergic to milk, all of whom refuse to eat the crusts of their bread.” (The Namesake: P 72)

Gogol celebrates two different birthdays. One with his American friends and other with his Bengali relatives. His parents have befriended a lot of Bengali couples in the campus.

- “A handful of women ululate as the proceedings begin. A conch shell is repeatedly tapped and passed around, but no one in the room is able to get it to emit a sound.” (The Namesake: P 40)

The Bengali friends present in Gogol's rice ceremony (annaprasan) held in America couldn't play the conch shell.

- "Ashima refuses to admit that Gogol lives with Maxine and her parents to her Bengali friends. She knows the relationship is something she must be willing to accept." (The Namesake: P 166)

Ashima finds it hard to accept that her son is in a live in relationship. She doesn't admit that to her friends. Because Indian customs and traditions don't allow an unmarried couple to stay together.

- "Ashima looks forward to Christmas when the four of them can be together. It bothers her that neither Gogol nor Sonia had come home for Thanksgiving this year. Ashima and Ashoke had spent Thanksgiving together, not bothering to buy a turkey for the first time in years." (The Namesake: P 166)

They have also assimilated with the dominant culture as well as retaining their cultural heritage in a new environment. Ashima and her family is found to celebrate Christmas, Thanksgiving along with their festivals and ceremonies.

- "Unlike her parents, and her other relatives, her grandmother had not admonished Ashima not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair or forget her family the moment she landed in Boston." (The Namesake: P 37)

"For Gogol's lunches they stand at the deli to buy cold cuts, and in the mornings Ashima makes sandwiches with bologna or roast beef." (The Namesake: P 65)

From the above mentioned statements, it is evident that Ashima's family has forbidden her to eat beef. But due to integration with different culture, Ashima had to make roast beef for the sake of her children.

- Moushumi is one of the second generation Indian immigrants. “She had always been admonished not to marry an American, as had he, but he gathers that in her case these warnings had been relentless, and had therefore plagued her far more than they had him. When she was only five years old, she was asked by her relatives if she planned to get married in a red sari or a white gown. By the time she was twelve she had made a pact, with two other Bengali girls she knew, never to marry a Bengali man. They had written a statement vowing never to do so, and spit on it at the same time, and buried it somewhere in her parents’ backyard.” (The Namesake: P 213)

Moushumi and Gogol had a bicultural upbringing. But it differed in certain way. She was constantly reminded of her marriage as the ultimate purpose of life. Her relatives even asked her to choose the wedding attire. As a child, she was baffled by such choice of different cultural aspects. While he had no such constraints.

4.3.2 Contrasting Images:

Different cultures have different cultural viewpoints. The contrasting images are consistently fused in the novel. The different cultural arenas infuse a new emotional intensity among the immigrants.

- The two different types of death rituals are represented here.
In America, the corpses are buried. They apply lipstick to their corpses and buried them in silk-lined boxes. But Ashima reminiscences her parents’ bodies swallowed by flames. Because corpses are burnt in India.
- Ashima is horrified for Gogol’s field trip to cemetery. Only in America are children taken to cemeteries in the name of art. In Calcutta the burning ghats are the most forbidden of places.

Here, Ashima is upset about the field trip to cemetery. The term ‘only in America’ is often used by Ashima. In Calcutta, it is forbidden to visit cemetery.

- Ashima often is disappointed and she tries her best not to, though she was here (America), not there (India).

The character ‘Ashima’ deals more with the identity crisis. As an immigrant, she tried to bridge the distance of both the places.

- Ashima and Ashoke organised Gogol’s rice ceremony. “There is no baptism for Bengali babies, no ritualistic naming in the eyes of God. The first formal ceremony of their lives centres on the consumption of solid food.” (The Namesake: P 38)

The author distinguishes the two birth rituals. Baptism in America and Annaprasanna in India.

- “Gogol visits the Ratliffs for dinner. Gerald tops off the wine and Lydia serves the food on broad white plates: a thin piece of steak rolled into a bundle and tied with string, sitting in a pool of dark sauce, the green beans boiled so that they are still crisp. A bowl of small, round, roasted red potatoes is passed around, and afterward a salad. They eat appreciatively, commenting on the tenderness of the meat, the freshness of the beans. His own mother would never have served so few dishes to a guest. She would have kept her eyes trained on Maxine’s plate, insisting she have seconds and then thirds. The table would have been lined with a row of serving bowls so that people could help themselves. But Lydia pays no attention to Gogol’s plate. She makes no announcement indicating that there is more.” (The Namesake: P 133)

Here, Gogol ponders about the contrasting image of dining at home and at Ratliffs’. Lydia and Ashima has two different images.

- “The Ratliffs are vociferous at the table, opinionated about things his own parents are indifferent to: movies, exhibits at museums, good restaurants, the designs of everyday things. Gogol is unaccustomed to this sort of talk at mealtimes, to the indulgent ritual of the lingering meal, and the pleasant aftermath of bottles and crumbs and empty glasses that clutter the table.” (The Namesake: P 133)

Gogol found it strange to adjust in dining with an American family. He wasn't accustomed to such intimacy with his parents like Maxine.

- “Maxine is surprised to hear certain things about Gogol's life that all his parents' friends are Bengali, that they had had an arranged marriage, that his mother cooks Indian food every day, she wears sari and a bindi. To him the terms of his parents' marriage are something at once unthinkable and unremarkable; nearly all their friends and relatives had been married in the same way. But their lives bear no resemblance to that of Gerald and Lydia.” (The Namesake: P 138)

The author portrays the different lifestyles of the Ganguli's and the Ratliff's. They were also contrarily wedded.

- “Gerald and Lydia bear no resemblance to that of his parent. Gerald presents expensive pieces of jewellery on Lydia's birthday, flowers brought home for no reason at all, the two of them kissing openly, going for walks through the city, or to dinner, just as Gogol and Maxine do. Seeing the two of them curled up on the sofa in the evenings, Gerald's head resting on Lydia's shoulder, Gogol is reminded that in all his life he has never witnessed a single moment of physical affection between his parents. Whatever love exists between them is an utterly private, uncelebrated thing. Maxine finds this little detail of his life as depressing. Gogol can't help but agree to it.” (The Namesake: P 138)

Gogol notices the affection of Lydia and Gerald which he hasn't witnessed between his parents. He is baffled of the differences in American and Indian way of life. Though his fondness of American lifestyle is clearly seen.

4.3.3 Canvas of Indian Sensibility:

The novels reflect the author's cultural, socio-political and religious background. The canvas of Indian sensibility covers the deep-seated spiritual beliefs, social, economic, political and philosophical ideals which is different from the rest of the world. The canvas of Indian sensibility reflects the author's feeling of being an Indian, whether he lives in India or abroad. The novels depict typical Indian atmosphere. The characters have a tradition and community value that gives them a sense of special identity. It can be found in various forms such as materials, practices and languages. The images of mythical elements, material culture and other Indian imagery are present not only in language but also in its soul. These typical Indian images incite Indian spirituality among the communities.

- The Ratliff's welcomed Gogol to their house. They are intrigued by his background. They discussed about India. "Gerald asks questions about the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, a topic Gogol knows little about. Lydia talks at length about Indian carpets and miniatures, Maxine about a college class she'd once taken on Buddhist stupas. Gerald mentions about an Indian colleague at work who went to India for his honeymoon. He'd brought back spectacular photographs, of a palace built on a lake in Udaipur.

They also talk about the geographical location of Calcutta. Gogol mentions that it is in the east, closer to Thailand. Gogol is surprised by their curiosity to know more about

Calcutta. They wanted to know if it's beautiful. Gogol is accustomed to people asking about the poverty, about the beggars and the heat. He tells them about the lovely Victorian architecture left over from the British. Gerald compares its account with Venice. Gogol remarks only during monsoons when the streets flood, it resembles Venice.” (The Namesake: P 134)

- Gauri visited India after a long time. The old way to the Dum Dum airport from VIP Road had once been remote place. Now it had altered to high-rise apartment buildings, glass-fronted offices, and a stadium. Lit-up malls and amusement parks. Foreign companies and five-star hotels. The city was called Kolkata now, the way Bengalis pronounced it. Flowers and trees were planted along the sides of the road. New flyovers, new sectors replacing what used to be farmland and swamp. Most of the cars in the city were imported, smaller sedans. She went to revisit her past. She asked the driver to take her to Tollygunge. Past the replica of Tipu Sultan's mosque, past the cemetery. There was a metro station now, opposite the depot, cutting through the city underground. It travelled all the way to Dum Dum. She saw the high brick walls on either side of the road, shielding the film studios, the Tolly Club. Forty years later the little mosque at the corner still stood, the red-and-white minarets visible. There were no empty plots in Tollygunge. The ponds and the lowland near their house were also gone. She was unprepared for the landscape to be so altered. There were no trace of that evening of Udayan's death, forty autumns ago. (The Lowland: P 390)

4.4 The Journeys of Indian Immigrants:

The Indian immigrants in the novels 'The Lowland' and 'The Namesake' emphasises their journey to another part of the world. Lahiri highlights the clashing cultural influence and their

experience of the larger social space. The characters of both the novels possess conflicting qualities which signify conflicting sets of values.

The differences of generation can also be found in the journey of Indian immigrants. The difference lies in their perspectives. The first generation finds the trip to India as 'homecoming' but the perspective changes regarding the second generation immigrants. For the second generation immigrants it is torment. Their concept of 'home' is different.

The first generation is emotionally connected to India as a geographical place with its specific culture. Because it holds their memories of childhood and their parents whom they miss dearly. Thus, they try to preserve Indian traditions in their new realm.

The second generation immigrants perceive America as their 'home'. Their parents constantly tries to preserve the Indian tradition along with other the Bengali expatriates. It is difficult for them to reconcile with their integrating experiences of America outside their personal space. They struggle to accept their cultural background. Most of the second generations such as Bela, Gogol, Sonia and Moushumi get romantically involved with Americans. They try to find love out of their conventions.

The Indian American diaspora thrives for the formation of identity. The chief arenas of Indian American characters lie within the home sphere. The choices of the characters indicate the hybrid Indian American identity.